DeMoss Family Early Pioneers

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For: FairburyNews.net
Date: August 14, 2023

The DeMoss family was among the early pioneer families to settle in Livingston County. The story of this family began with the birth of James Henry DeMoss Sr. in 1786 in West Virginia. James H. DeMoss Sr. was the son of John K. DeMoss (1755-1814) and Martha LaHuff (1794-1852).

In 1808, James H. DeMoss married Nancy Hamilton in Ohio. James and Nancy were both 22 years of age when they married. James and Nancy DeMoss had nine children.

The War of 1812 lasted from 1812 until 1815 and was fought by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. James H. DeMoss was 26 years of age when this War began in 1812. James H. DeMoss served as a Private in Captain Joseph Rockhold's Company from Ross County, Ohio.

According to the 1878 Livingston County history book by LeBaron, John K. DeMoss, father of James H. DeMoss Sr., originally came from Virginia and settled at the mouth of the Miami River in Ohio and helped to build a fort there. In 1814, near the end of the War of 1812, John K. DeMoss was killed by Native Americans. John K. DeMoss was 58 when he was killed in Ohio.

Livingston County was formed in 1837. In 1841, the James and Nancy DeMoss family relocated to Avoca Township, north of present-day Fairbury. James H. DeMoss Sr. was 55 when he moved his family to Avoca Township.

In September 1847, the Livingston County Court contracted with Henry Jones, J. H. DeMoss, and Philip Rollings to build a bridge over the river at Pontiac for $450. The three men proceeded to build the bridge. Unfortunately, in March of 1849, a freshet carried the new bridge away, according to the 1878 Livingston County history book by LeBaron. A freshet is a great rise or overflowing of a stream caused by heavy rains or melted snow. Mr. Rollings and Mr. DeMoss were ordered to save what they could of the new bridge and rebuild it.

James H. DeMoss Sr. built the first grain mill in Pontiac and helped build the first courthouse in Livingston County. He died in 1852 at the age of 66. His wife, Nancy DeMoss, died in 1853 at the age of 67. James H. DeMoss Sr. and his wife, Nancy DeMoss, were buried in the Patty Cemetery southeast of Pontiac.

Between 1830 when Valentine Darnell became the first settler in the area, and 1852, very few families lived in Livingston County. Central Illinois was swampland, and it had no railroads. In 1850, Congress passed a script law that gave primarily veterans of the War of 1812 free land in Illinois. Most of these veterans had no interest in moving to the

swamps of Illinois. These veterans sold their land rights for about 30 cents an acre, well below the official federal government land price of $2.50 per acre. The 1850 law created a stampede of new settlers into Livingston County between 1852 and 1860.

Because there were relatively few families living in Livingston County in that era, the children of the early pioneer settlers had no choice but to marry the children of other early pioneer settlers.

Sanford Sparks (1808-1859) was one of the early settlers in Avoca Township. Alexander DeMoss (1810-1880) was one of the sons of James and Nancy DeMoss. Alexander DeMoss married Sarah Sparks, one of the daughters of Sanford Sparks. William DeMoss (1828-1895), another son of James and Nancy DeMoss, married Charlotte A. Sparks (1829-1910), another daughter of Sanford Sparks.

James H. DeMoss Jr. (1808-1852), son of James H. DeMoss Sr., married Margaret Nace (1809-1868). One of the daughters of James and Margaret DeMoss, Emily DeMoss (1848-1905), married Thomas "Wiley" Sparks (1846-1930), who was the son of Sanford Sparks. One of the sons of James and Margaret DeMoss, Henry J. DeMoss (1830-1905), married Mary A. Popejoy (1932-1889), daughter of early Livingston County settler Nathan Popejoy (1784-1845).

Leander DeMoss (1869-1942) was a great-grandson of James H. Demoss Sr. He married Olive Sparks (1871-1959), who was the daughter of Wiley Sparks.

In 1878, six different DeMoss families were living in Fairbury. These included Thomas, Asa, William, Levi, James H., and Henry DeMoss.

Tragedy struck a descendant of James H. DeMoss Sr. in 1924. Fifteen-year-old Thelma Lucile DeMoss was the daughter of Leander DeMoss (1869-1942) and Olive J. Sparks (1871-1959). Thelma and two girlfriends decided to swim across the Munz sandpit located in the present-day Indian Creek Golf Course. The three girls crossed the pond and decided to swim back. Thelma did not make it back across and disappeared below the water. Rescuers found her body, but she could not be revived. Thelma was the great-great-granddaughter of James H. DeMoss Sr.

Another descendant of James H. DeMoss Sr. was Beatrice DeMoss. She was another great-great-granddaughter of James H. DeMoss Sr. Beatrice married Philip Tetley (1906-1956). Bea and her husband managed two restaurants, the Crossroads Cafe in Forrest and the Honegger House Hotel and Cafe in Fairbury. Later, she was employed by the National Bank of Fairbury for 25 years, retiring in 1979. Bea Tetley died in 2014 at the age of 96.

In the early phases of Fairbury area history, the DeMoss name was one of the most common names in the area. Although the DeMoss name has almost disappeared in current events, the family has made significant contributions to the development of the Fairbury area since 1841.

Dolly Madison had the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington removed and saved just before the British burned the White House during the War of 1812.